

Wicked Girls: A Novel

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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May 2017

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2017

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Abstract

Being an English Language Arts teacher to young people means being acutely aware and involved in the world of young adult literature. This novel is an exercise in the realm of writing and in the realm of young adult literature. This project includes the writing, editing, cover design, and self-publishing processes. The end product is a completed novel from cover to cover, available for purchase online.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Jeff Spanke for advising me through this project. Five months of novel writing, two months of editing and publishing, and five months of student teaching made for a wild ride during my senior year, but thankfully Dr. Spanke was there with advice and assistance throughout it all.

I would also like to thank Brandon Patterson for his unending support, encouragement, and love, and also for his expert assistance with formatting the final product. I am forever thankful.

I would like to thank Professor Shantanu Suman, assistant professor of art at Ball State University, and Alexandria Marie Southern, a sophomore student in the visual communication department in the school of art at Ball State University. The design for the cover looks amazing, and it certainly would not have been half as beautiful without you two. Thank you so much for volunteering your time and effort to my project.

Finally, I would like to thank the students of my student teaching classroom who were always excited to hear about what I was writing. I started this novel for myself, but I finished it for them.

Process Analysis Statement

(Artist's Statement)

Introduction

For my honors thesis project, I had a few choices in what I wanted to do. I could write a paper about English language arts, education, or a mixture of the two, or I could write an interdisciplinary paper that included something entirely new to me. I chose not to do any of these, and instead went with the creative project option. For my creative project I focused on my two passions, creative writing and young adults. With the support and encouragement of my advisor, Dr. Jeff Spanke, I decided to write a young adult novel.

This novel is a story about a young woman named Abbigail Shephard. When Abbi moves from the sunny desert of Phoenix, Arizona to the small, conservative mid-west town of Pine Creek, Illinois, she expects her life to become far less interesting. When she discovers a secret about herself, her life becomes absolutely magical. Suddenly, it's up to her to save not only herself but her friends and family as well. Along the way, she discovers what real friends are and just how wicked girls can be.

I decided to write this story in order to explore the world of young adult literature through the lens of a writer. As a secondary English teacher, I know quite a lot about the types of books that children should read as well as the types of books that children choose to read. I wanted to explore the world of these books more in depth. I wanted to know what it was like to create one of these books. In order to do this, my honors thesis project became a journey in writing, creating, and self-publishing my own novel. The first paragraph of this statement,

above, is actually the blurb that I wrote for the back cover of that novel. Throughout the process of writing this novel, I have learned so much about writing, editing, cover design, and the self-publishing process.

Writing

The first step in creating my novel was also the most difficult and time consuming. I had to start with writing. Many authors have some sort of method when they write. Many authors do extensive research. Many authors create story boards. Some authors prefer to be in a particular place while they write. Some authors need total silence, others need some background noise. In order to start writing, I had to figure out my own method. Before I began writing, at the behest of my advisor, I did a bit of research into the Salem witch trials. I knew that I wanted my novel to be a modern take on the story of the Salem witch trials, and I also knew that my story needed to be completed in about five months so that I had time to edit and publish. My advisor also told me that the average young adult novel contains about 75,000 words. After doing a bit of research, I knew what elements of the Salem witch trials would be key to my story, and I knew how much I would need to write and how quickly in order to have my novel completed in time.

For a lot of authors, these pieces would add up to some kind of method. For me, it did not. Honestly, I just started writing. I tried out a lot of different methods that I had seen from other authors. None of them really worked for me. I had a notebook in which I meant to write ideas that I had for my novel as I had them, but I never really felt the inclination to write in it. I tried to create a story board for my novel, but I had trouble thinking too far ahead into my story

without losing sight of what I had already written. Eventually, I decided that the best method for me was to just sit down and write every single night until I had reached my word count goal for that night. Even this method proved to be almost useless to me. As a busy college student in the middle of my senior year of my undergraduate degree, I often found myself without much time to write. Instead, I would more often than not just abuse my writing goal and shove the majority of my writing into the second half of the month. Sometimes I would get so far behind that I would have to shut myself in my room for hours doing nothing but writing until I had my word count back up to where it needed to be.

Although I had no real method to my madness, I did get my writing done at a relatively regular pace. In order to reach 75,000 words in 5 months, I had to write about 15,000 words per month. At the end of each month, I would submit what I had completed to my advisor for editing. With very little exception, this is what I did. Most months I did not quite meet the 15,000 word goal, but I did get close enough to be satisfied with my progress. By the end of the writing process, I had written about 65,000 words. By the time the final edits were done, that had grown to about 66,000 words.

Editing

After I turned in each of the five sections, Dr. Spanke read them, and he and I met so that we could talk about what I'd written. It was during these meetings that the real meat of my story started to take shape. This was where I really started to flesh out why I was writing and where my story was going.

Aside from the usual, minor spelling and grammar mistakes, there were also occasional story line problems. Some of the biggest problems that came up towards the beginning of the novel included my lack of knowledge of the catholic school system and my lack of skill in keeping secrets. I originally wrote that Abbi was going to a catholic school, but I was so clumsy about writing that particular setting that I ended up changing it in the end. I also attempted to keep my narrator's identity a secret when I was first writing, but that ended up coming off as me forgetting to give my reader all of the information that they need. This too was amended by the final copy by simply writing more into the introduction.

In the process of creating this novel, I started and finished the entire writing process before beginning the editing process. The editing process started with fixing some of the bigger issues in the book, the issues that affected the whole story line. Then I worked on the smaller grammar and spelling issues. Finally, I had to format the novel for publishing, so I had Brandon Patterson, a good friend, scan through it as he helped me format the whole thing. This meant that I had read through the novel at least three times (once as I was writing, again before I turned each section in, and again during the editing process), Dr. Spanke had read through it once, and Brandon had scanned through it once. This was a total of at least five times that the novel was edited at some level.

Even through all of this editing, there are still mistakes present in the final copy. As soon as I received the first proof copy, I started to read through it. Of course, as soon as I started to read through it, I started to notice mistakes that I hadn't noticed before. It seems the editing process is never finished. I'm sure I will continue to edit this novel possibly for the rest of my life. For now though, I am content with where it is. After all of the editing, the next step in

creating this novel was to publish, but before that happened, I would need a cover for my novel.

Cover Design

Thankfully, for the design of the cover of this novel, Dr. Spanke had plenty of ideas before I even had to consider it. Before I had even started writing, Dr. Spanke showed me some of the novels that he had helped students with, and even a novel that he had created himself. All of the novels that he showed me had covers that he had designed. When it came to my own novel, Dr. Spanke offered to create a cover for me, but as I got into the writing, he came up with a more interesting idea. Dr. Spanke spoke to Professor Shantanu Suman. Prof. Suman is a professor in the art department at Ball State, and he was more than willing to volunteer his time to help with my project.

After a handful of meetings and some much appreciated help from one of his sophomore students, Alexandria Southern, I had a beautiful and creative cover to my novel. During one meeting, we discussed what types of symbols were in the story and what I would like to see in the design. The only problem was that I really had no vision for the design at all. There weren't really any particular images that I wanted to see on the cover and there weren't any designs or even colors that I really preferred. I had no idea what I wanted, and I'm sure that that did not help Prof. Suman or Ms. Southern at all. Yet they were still able to come up with one amazing design.

The process of working with a designer to create my novel has been a very unique one, I think. When getting a novel published by a paid publisher, the publisher themselves find editors

and cover designers. Those aren't things that the author really needs to worry about.

Sometimes the author doesn't even need to approve of the editing or design choices. They just happen. Authors that take the self-publishing route have to find ways to get these things done for themselves. This is why it was such a privilege for me to have a professional designer work with me to create the perfect look for my writing. Although I didn't really have an image for my novel when we started, after seeing the final design, I really couldn't have imagined anything better.

Self-publishing

When it came to the actual publishing process, most of the work began with my advisor. Dr. Spanke had already worked with a website that helped authors self-publish, so he knew the requirements for the submission. It was only after we had a completely formatted text and a finalized cover that he handed control of the publication to me.

The website that we used to publish this novel was Lulu.com. Lulu allows writers to create their own works and cover art while giving their novels a unique ISBN number which helps sellers to identify it on the shelves and online. Lulu also distributes novels to sellers including Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble online. Each novel costs about twelve dollars to print and distribute. This means that any amount over twelve dollars goes to the author. Lulu also allows authors to set the price of their novels. The default price is right around 15 dollars, and this is what I chose to sell my novel for. I didn't want my novel to be too expensive because it is not by any means a professional novel, but I also wanted to make a small amount of money

if any of them did sell. With the help of this program, all I have to do is find people who are willing to purchase my novel.

Thankfully, Lulu takes care of most of the maintenance and distribution issues with each novel, so I didn't have to worry about that. Instead, I was able to submit my novel and after a few weeks of waiting it will be available to publish from some very popular sellers. Overall, the self-publishing process was exceedingly simple and satisfying.

Conclusion

For my honors thesis project, I decided to write a young adult novel. In writing this novel I was able to not only explore the world of creative writing, but also the realms of editing, cover design, and self-publishing. This project took about eight months from conception to publication, and every moment of it was something new and interesting for me. Before I started this project, I had never written a novel on my own before, but now I can truly say that I have a novel available to purchase with my own name on the cover. Every word on all 200+ of those pages was written by me. It is my novel and there is no disputing that. I am proud of myself and every single person who helped me along the way.

My goal for the future is to become more involved with and aware of other publishing routes. For this novel I self-published, but for my future novels, I would like to go through an actual publisher. A professional publisher could supply an editor, cover designer, and distributors all at once. Publishing professionally would also give my future novels a certain amount of recognition, prestige, and advertising that they would not otherwise receive. The first step in publishing another novel though will be writing another novel. Perhaps *Wicked Girls*

needs a sequel, or perhaps I can write more interesting high fantasy stories. Whatever I write, I hope to get the chance to work on a project like this again in the future. I have learned so much in the last eight months, I can only imagine what I could learn if I did it all again.